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Subject: Wheeler Orders Broad Review Of IRIS' Agenda, Role, Heightening Concerns

Good morning,

Article InsideEPA reflects public comments Andrew made at an RFS meeting. **Deliberative Process / Ex. 5**

Deliberative Process / Ex. 5

Thanks,

Tina

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Daily News

Wheeler Orders Broad Review Of IRIS' Agenda, Role, Heightening Concerns

July 27, 2018

EPA's Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler has launched a broad review of the agency's premiere chemical risk analysis program, a move that critics say could allow the new chief and other political appointees to kill or delay pending Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessments, including the controversial draft analysis of formaldehyde.

"What I have asked the IRIS program is that we need to make sure we have identified the customer for analysis," Wheeler told reporters at July 25 event on the renewable fuel standard in Washington, D.C.

"And we need to know what the end result of the product will be, and what the regulatory process" is, "not just for formaldehyde but for all the IRIS assessments," he said.

"I have asked them to come back to me with some information about how we are going to use the assessments for the regulatory program," he added.

Wheeler said that Congress' 2016 reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) "is supposed to be the state of the art on risk assessments and I want to make sure that we understand how IRIS fits into that. . . . They are supposed to get back to me with a game plan for how we are going to implement that across the board."

Asked if there is a time line for his request, Wheeler said there is none.

An agency source says Wheeler's comment on IRIS' role in relation to that of EPA's toxics office gives him an out "not to do anything with IRIS, or not have anything go out unless it's part of TSCA."

Asked for comments on Wheeler's remarks, an EPA spokeswoman says only, "EPA continues to discuss the formaldehyde assessment with our Agency program partners, and are weighing this assessment with other Agency priorities."

Wheeler's comments came as lawmakers on the House science committee approved legislation that would effectively eliminate the IRIS program and delegate its functions to EPA program offices -- though the legislation faces long odds.

Supporters said the legislation was needed in part because the IRIS program has been so inefficient in completing assessments in a timely fashion.

However, EPA's long-running effort to update its 1989 assessment of formaldehyde exposure's risks to human health has reportedly been completed for months, but not released for public comment or peer review -- the next steps in IRIS' process for developing assessments.

Congressional Democrats have been questioning EPA about its failure to release the draft assessment, at odds with Congress' direction in the agency's 2017 budget for officials to send the study to peer review. EPA later committed to doing so by Sept. 30, 2018, in its report to Congress on IRIS last January.

"We have seen a disturbing trend at EPA lately where science is being sidelined. I am extremely concerned by reports that the release of a study, which details cancer risks from formaldehyde, is being delayed and the results kept hidden from the public," Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY), a member of the House science committee and energy and commerce committee, noted at a July 24 hearing.

And Senate Democrats in May sent former Administrator Scott Pruitt a letter demanding information on the assessment's status, citing information they said they had received indicating that the draft assessment has been completed for months -- but because it concludes that formaldehyde can cause leukemia, industry groups have questioned EPA's scientific analysis and urged Trump EPA appointees to block the draft's release.

'In A Pickle'

Agency sources tell *Inside EPA* that Wheeler's directives would likely be advanced by requiring IRIS to share a list of pending and planned assessments with Trump administration nominees and appointees leading the program and regional offices that generally request IRIS assessments.

One agency source says such a request will put appointees "in a pickle" over their responses on whether the formaldehyde assessment has customers and should proceed.

A decision to advance the assessment will win support from some stakeholders and opposition from others -- as would a decision to halt the assessment, the source said.

For example, Natural Resources Defense Council's Jennifer Sass told *Inside EPA* that "the IRIS program is perfectly clear about who its users (customers) are, and have said so repeatedly in public fora including at the recent National Academies review."

But the American Chemistry Council (ACC), which has long raised concerns about the pending formaldehyde assessment, called IRIS assessments "one piece of information that could be used to inform future regulatory decisions, but they must be grounded in sound science," a

spokeswoman tells *Inside EPA*. "Unfortunately, when an IRIS assessment demonstrates that it has no plans to evaluate and integrate the best available science or seemingly circumvents robust internal review processes, the attention on the assessment is rightly increased." -- *Maria Hegstad* (mhegstad@iwpnews.com)

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